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NORTHERN ZAMBEZIA From 1500 to 1800*

By Kings M. Phiri

A written history of the region north of the Lower Zambezi does not exist and an attempt to produce one has to be conceived with several problems in mind. In the first place the region was inhabited by many segmentary societies few of which shared similar experiences at any particular point in time. Secondly, written data on most of them does not exist, while the amount of oral tradition available from society to society is hard to assess, given the present individualistic attitude toward the preservation of this kind of material. This being the case, this article is only an exploratory account and examination of the most significant processes of change in the region bounded by the Luangwa River in the west and Indian Ocean in the east up to 1800.

The peoples of this region were, at the beginning of the 16th century, mostly Bantu-speaking immigrants who had in earlier centuries, drifted into the region from the northwest. Furthermore, they belonged to the "matrilineal cluster of Central Bantu speakers" which occupies much of Central Africa from central Zaire in the west to the coast of Mozambique in the east.⁽¹⁾ Notable among them were the Nsenga who lived near the lower Luangwa valley, the Chewa and their Maravi rulers in the middle and then the Lolo, Makua and other Lomwe speakers, and Yao in the country between the Shire River and the Indian Ocean (See attached map). The descendants of all these peoples still occupy the same areas in what is now known as Eastern Zambia, Central and Southern Malawi, and Northern Mozambique.

It is now believed that the initial arrival of these people into country north of the Zambezi River occurred during the Later Iron Age, sometime between the 13th and 15th centuries. At that time, arriving from the north in clans or agglomerations of clans, they displaced or assimilated the earlier Bantu and pre-Bantu agriculturalists and hunters. Memory of the latter is fast disappearing among the present inhabitants of the region; they were known as Katanga among the Nsenga in the west, and as Zimba or Kalimanjira (pathmakers) among the Chewa of the central plateau.⁽²⁾ Linguistically and technologically, the new immigrants were probably not much different from those whom they displaced.

The Nsenga in the west claim that their ancestors came from Uluba (or Luba country) beyond the Luapula River. At the time of their arrival in the country east of the Luangwa valley, they found it occupied by the Katanga and Mwambonela, a "primitive" group of hunters.⁽³⁾ In subsequent phases of their history, according to

*This paper has been prepared as part of a UNESCO – sponsored project, whose results are due for publication in 1980 – 81.

Lane-Poole who first studied them, the Nsenga came under the linguistic influence of the Lala and Lenje who invaded the country west of theirs. At the same time, if not a little later, they also came under the cultural and political influence of the Chewa or Maravi.⁽⁴⁾

The historian is often forced to admit that the Nsenga do not possess a coherent body of tradition about their independent development as a nation in pre-colonial times. What is known about them suggests that their early history was interwoven with that of their neighbours. This was not the case with their eastern Chewa neighbours.

More than any society in Northern Zambezia, the Chewa have received a great deal of attention from scholars. There is therefore a considerable body of recorded oral tradition about them.⁽⁵⁾ From this material, it seems that they emerged as an ethnic group from the interaction of several streams of migrants all of which had their origin in the north.⁽⁶⁾ To the earliest of these layers, the term "Proto-Chewa" is sometimes applied. More specifically this term has been associated with Banda, Zimba and Mbewe clan elements within present-day Chewa society. These clans are also occasionally associated with a local creation myth according to which man and all the animals and birds of his Malawian environment were created at Kapingitiwa Hill on the boundary between Central Malawi and the Tete district of western Mozambique ⁽⁷⁾. However, the most representative traditions from these clans maintain that their ancestors originally came from an unremembered country in the north, probably at the beginning of the Central African Later Iron Age (1100 – 1500 A.D.). Over these earlier Chewa immigrants, later invaders, including the Maravi in the 15th Century, superimposed themselves⁽⁸⁾ as will be shown later on.

To the east of the Chewa-speaking peoples, the traditions about the beginnings of Lolo, Makua and Yao societies have not yet been collected and compiled.⁽⁹⁾ At the beginning of the 16th Century, the Lolo occupied the southwestern part of Northern Mozambique, while the Makua and other Lomwe-speaking groups inhabited the coast opposite Mozambique Island and its hinterland as far as the highlands in the central part of Northern Mozambique. The Yao had their homeland to the northwest of the Makua between the Ruvuma River in the north and the Lujenda in the south ⁽¹⁰⁾.

None of these three ethnic groupings have traditions of having migrated into their present homelands from elsewhere ⁽¹¹⁾. This is probably because historical research has not yet been done in the heartland of Northern Mozambique where an ancient tradition may still exist. Alternatively, the peoples concerned may have occupied the country many centuries ago and have long since lost memory of where they came from originally.

However, the Lolo and Makua were rapidly extending the areas under their control at the beginning of the 16th Century. They did

this by expanding northwestwards from the country between the Zambezi and Lurio rivers. Later in the late 17th Century, the Yao also began to spread west and south-westwards from their original homeland around Yao Hill⁽¹²⁾

The political structure from Nsengaland in the west to the Northern Mozambique Coast in the east at the beginning of the 16th Century was characterised by the two-tier hierarchy of localised chieftaincy. This form of political organisation revolved around a local chief who was the uppermost authority to whom a number of lineage heads made appeal. The chief in this position, almost everywhere, ruled over a group of closely related lineage-based villages of which his own was the most senior genealogically. To the community of villages surrounding him, the chief rendered religious, judicial and military services, and was in turn entitled to the allegiance of all his followers.

Among the Nsenga, Chewa and Makua, this political structure was greatly transformed or modified by the emergence of the Maravi state system in the 16th Century and its subsequent expansion in the 17th. The emergence and expansion of this state system then has been the subject of greater interpretation than any other aspect of Chewa history^{,(12)}

Different writers of Chewa history agree that the Maravi state builders were later immigrants into the Northern Zambezi region who originated in the Luba region of southeastern Zaire. Furthermore with the help of archaeological evidence it has been indicated that their arrival in the lake Malaŵi region occurred in the 15th century^{,(13)} From then until the mid – 17th Century, the Maravi established themselves as rulers, consolidated their kingdoms, and then made further incursions into other parts of northern Zambezia. By the early 17th Century, their confederation of states encompassed the greater part of Eastern Zambia, Central and Southern Malaŵi, and Northern Mozambique. The Maravi confederation therefore had a political and military impact over practically the whole region with which this paper is concerned.

Africanist historians have already given considerable attention to the question of how pre-colonial states evolved in different parts of sub-saharan Africa^{,(14)} With regard to the Maravi state system, this concern with the emergence of states must be raised again since no one is as yet clear as to how the Maravi immigrants established themselves as rulers over the earlier Chewa inhabitants of the region. It is also obvious that the process of Maravi state – formation occurred so long ago and can therefore no longer be easily reconstructed from the evidence at hand. Such evidence as is available has to be subjected to the highest degree of abstraction to be conducive to the kind of interpretation I will now set down below.

The most common theory is that the Maravi arrived in the country as a group of invaders who were fully equipped with the symbols of chiefly power with the help of which they managed to establish themselves as a ruling class over what must have been a stateless indigenous population.⁽¹⁵⁾ This theory emphasizes the external origins of Maravi kingship and political institutions, thus possibly underplaying the intricate interweaving of indigenous and immigrant ideologies or practices which went into the making of the Maravi political culture. On this latter point, Andrew Roberts has argued that although invasion and conquest may have been crucial steps in the creation of states in some parts of tropical Africa, historians should also think in terms of how newcomers acquired authority by virtue of techniques and ideas which everyone else may have found attractive and adaptable.⁽¹⁶⁾ In other words in a socially and economically differentiated society, the group which possessed ideas and techniques which could be employed in the efficient exploitation of the natural environment or in the resolutions of long-standing conflicts or feuds was also more likely to dominate the others.

There is in fact some indication that the state founded by the Kalonga at the southern end of Lake Malaŵi was a product of the interaction between indigenous Proto-Cheŵa and Maravi immigrants political and social ideologies. For example, the Maravi are said to have introduced the system of territorial chieftaincy but adopted the religious cults of the Proto-Cheŵa as a unifying force within their newly created states. Secondly, they effectively established themselves as “owners of the land” and yet left the pre-Maravi headmen to be allocators of land to corporate or individual cultivators.⁽¹⁷⁾

Oral tradition is rather reticent on exactly how the Maravi state was founded. It maintains, however, that under the leadership of Kalonga Chidzonzi, who then headed the most senior royal Phiri lineage, the Maravi established their parent kingdom around Mankhamba and Manthimba on the western side of Lake Malaŵi's forked southern end. Here, the Kalonga (a title by which those who ruled the state were known) set up his headquarters at Manthimba or Maravi and designated the village of Mankhamba (which probably predated the advent of the Maravi) as the religious centre of the kingdom. Manthimba developed into an important commercial and political centre in the 16th and 17th centuries. For according to Luiz Marianno, who was a Portuguese resident of Sena in 1624; it was a densely populated place, within two miles of the lake, with whose inhabitants the Portuguese from Tete conducted a prosperous trade ⁽¹⁸⁾

The traditions also suggest that the Kalonga's state was held

together by several integrative mechanisms and institutions in its early days. One of these institutions was the *Mlira* cult. Once every year, about the month of September, heads of the different royal Phiri lineages were invited to Manthimba for the ritual veneration of *Mlira*, a snake-spirit of the great Kalonga (Chinkhole) who led their ancestors into the country at the time of the migration from the north. The ritual culminated in the burning of the Marimba bush which stretched for a considerable distance along the lake. This ritual, I believe was a surface manifestation of a royal cult which had a significant integrative function within the Maravi state. ⁽¹⁹⁾ The Kalonga also made good use of appointive offices of state. He appointed some heads of pre-Maravi clans or lineages to important leadership positions within his state. The Banda, for example, were caretakers (*amatsano*) of the Kalonga's shrine at Mankhamba, while it is maintained that Khombe of the Mwale clan led the Kalonga's warriors in battle. Traditions to this effect clearly underscore the fact that non-Phiri clan leaders were involved in the making of decisions on land tenure, the distribution of wealth, and the making of war ²⁰⁾

In the first half of the 16th Century, the Kalonga began to expand the amount of territory under his control, through heads of the junior Phiri lineages. Such heads were sent out from the Manthimba-Mankhamba area into the adjacent territories to the east, south, west and north. Mpinganjila was sent eastwards to occupy the country around lake Malombe. Nyangu moved south into the upper valley of the Shire river; Changamile was sent westward to occupy the southern part of the Kirk range while Chauma migrated into the northern part of it; and Chinsamba colonised the country to the north of the Manthimba-Mankhamba area. Taken together, the territory controlled by the Kalonga and these junior kinsmen of his formed the heartland of the Maravi state system as it evolved in the 17th century.

Another aspect of the Maravi expansion involved the dispatch of the Kalonga's more senior kinsmen into distant lands to the south and southwest of the heartland. This may have been a calculated move on the part of the early Kalongas as they sought to remove to distant parts of the kingdom those who would have contended for the throne at Manthimba. Among these were Kaphwiti and Lundu who migrated into and colonised the Lower Shire valley. Of the two, Kaphwiti was senior and probably controlled the whole valley before he lost much of his authority to Lundu. ⁽²¹⁾ By 1572, however, the paramountcy of Kaphwiti had suffered an enigmatic blow for Lundu was then recognised as ruler of the whole valley from the Murchison or Mamvera rapids in the north to the confluence of the Zambezi with the Shire in the south. ⁽²²⁾ Furthermore, the desire to control the

Sena ivory trade with the Portuguese probably accounted for the Lundu's expansion of his sphere of influence, just as it led to the decline of the Kaphwitis who found themselves cut off from this trade.⁽²³⁾

It was the Lundu who, after his ascendancy in the Lower Shire valley, spearheaded Maravi expansion eastwards into Lolo and Makua country. The process of Maravi expansion in this part of northern Zambezia appears to have started soon after the mid – 16th century. According to G.T. Nurse's historical linguistic analysis, the Maravi or Chewa in this part of Northern Mozambique must have began to interact with the Lolo and Makua not later than 1560.⁽²⁴⁾

Maravi invasion and conquest of Lolo–Makua country owed much to the fanaticism of the Lundu's warriors, whom some historians of Zambezia have identified with the notorious Zimba marauders of the late 16th century, and to the statelessness of the Lolo and Makua societies. It has been said of the Lolo in particular that "they had never been and seem never to have wanted to be notable or important". They were in other words, organised into highly segmentary political systems and remained this way in spite of the pressures to which they were later subjected by Maravi and Portuguese imperialism. Like the Lolo, the Makua also had a segmentary political system, but among them lineages belonging to the same clan sometimes combined in times of need under the leadership of the one who headed the most powerful lineage.⁽²⁵⁾ Under this kind of impetus and as a result of Portuguese pressures, strong chieftaincies emerged among the coastal Makua in the late 16th century.⁽²⁶⁾

Led by the Lundu, the Maravi nevertheless conquered both the Lolo and Makua and incorporated them into a tributary state which the Portuguese residents of the Lower Zambezi called "Bororo". In this conquest state, about which more is known than any aspect of Makua – Lolo history up to 1800, the Lunda's generals and other vassals assumed leadership positions but extensively employed the Lolo as auxilliary warriors and tribute collectors.

By the first two decades of the 17th century, the Lundu thus controlled a vast territory north of the Zambezi, from the Lower valley of the Shire in the west to within reach of the Indian Ocean in the east. To the Portuguese along the Zambezi the Lundu was then simply "the second most powerful person (after the Kalonga) in the empire of Maravi."⁽²⁷⁾

The Lundu held his vast territory together with the help of loyal

military generals and vassals drawn from junior lineages within his royal clan. However, a common economic interest existed among different peoples of the state who depended on the salt, iron and *machila* cotton cloths produced by the Lundu's Mang'anja subjects in the Lower Shire valley.⁽²⁸⁾ Mang'anja religion also played a unifying role in the state. Centred on the M'Bona cult whose central shrine was at Khulubvi in the Lower Shire, the theology of Mang'anja religion encompassed many elements of commoner protest against the misuse of royal power and prerogative. Consequently, the official cult of the Lundu paramountcy found many adherents over a large territory stretching from the seat of the Lundus in the lower shire valley to the Zambezi delta on the East Coast.⁽²⁹⁾

The immense prestige enjoyed by the Lundu in the south could not go unchallenged by the Kalonga in the north. The Kalonga who himself controlled a vast stretch of country to the east of Lake Malaŵi and the Upper shire valley ⁽³⁰⁾ grew nervous about his erstwhile subordinate's rising star. In the 1620's and 1930's therefore Maravi expansion eastward was stalled by the vicious internal rivalry which developed between the Kalonga and Lundu ⁽³¹⁾. Thereafter, the focus of Maravi expansion appears to have shifted from the east to the southwest. In the modern Tete province of Mozambique and Petauke district of Zambia, Undi then embarked on one of the most successful expansionist campaigns in the history of Maravi states.

According to one version of the traditions, Undi was sent out by the Kalonga to occupy the sandy plains near Nsengaland. Another version, however, suggests that Undi's departure for the west was occasioned by a major conflict within the ruling Phiri clan at Manthimba.⁽³²⁾

After separating from the Kalonga in the east, Undi and his followers struck west and eventually crossed Dzalanyama range of mountains into the modern Tete province of Mozambique. There, they successfully colonised the area along the Kapoche River, a tributary of the Zambezi in the Tete district of Mozambique, in the 17th century ⁽³³⁾. In the decades which followed, Undi succeeded in extending his influence westward toward the Lower Luangwa area. In this general direction, his warriors came into conflict with the Tawara along the Zambezi and the Nsenga near the Lower Luangwa.

The first notable event in the history of the Nsenga, apparently, was this invasion of their country by Undi's followers in the mid – 17th Century. The invasion was directed by Chimwala, Undi's classificatory nephew, and it initially resulted in the capitulation of Mundikula who then headed the largest and most important Nsenga

clan – that of the Mwanza. Following Mundikula's defeat, Chimwala and his men then subjugated Chifuka, leader of the Lungu clan. With his defeat, the rest of the Nsenga submitted themselves to Maravi suzerainty.

Undi and his vassals are said to have allowed the Nsenga chieftains to administer the affairs of their clans and areas, as long as they sent him tribute in ivory, slaves and foodstuffs. Nevertheless, from the time of the conquest, the Nsenga adopted the Maravi system of chieftainship which they also adapted to suit their own customs.⁽³⁴⁾ This imitation of Maravi political institutions explains why the Mundikula (or Kalindawalo) and Chifuka chiefly lines maintain that Undi installed them as chiefs in the olden days.

In the 17th century, therefore, the Maravi emerged as the most aggressive power-brokers in northern Zambezia. The Portuguese, ensconced in their settlements along the Zambezi, were forced to cooperate with them. For two generations at the beginning of the 17th century, the Portuguese, from Angoche on the East Coast to Tete up the Zambezi, found the Maravi useful collaborators in their campaigns against the Karanga south of the Zambezi and local enemies in the immediate vicinity of their Zambezi settlements. For example, in 1608 the Portuguese residents of Tete received 4,000 men from Kalonga Muzula for their campaign against the local enemies of Muhnumutapa Catsi Rusere who was then a Portuguese ally. Six years later in 1614 the Portuguese at Sena sought the assistance of the Lundu in mounting an armed expedition to Chicova north of Tete to search for Silver. The Kalonga was again called upon to assist the Portuguese in 1623. This time he dispatched thousands of warriors across the Zambezi to help the Portuguese suppress some Karanga chiefs who threw their country into turmoil following the death of Gatsi Rusere. The Kalonga's warriors later retreated to their side of the Zambezi laden with loot in the form of gold and cattle. Yet again in 1635, the Lundu's followers aided the Portuguese in crushing an uprising of Swahili chieftains in Angoche (Quelimane) district north of the Zambezi delta.⁽³⁵⁾

There is also evidence, on the other hand, to indicate that the Portuguese cooperated with the Maravi out of necessity rather than choice. Up to the end of the 17th century, the Portuguese residents of Sena and Tete dreaded the Maravi whom they regarded as very bad neighbours," unlike the Lolo and Makua who gave them no trouble⁽³⁶⁾

What the effects of Maravi expansion were, however, must remain the subject of further investigation. For the time being it should perhaps be noted that the creation of the Lundu state east of the Lower Shire valley made it possible for the M'Bona cult to spread its influence more widely than would otherwise have been possible. The economic and cultural effects were perhaps as significant. Within

territory encompassed by the Maravi confederation in the 17th Century, trade in ivory flourished.⁽³⁷⁾ As a result, the region appears to have experienced a modicum of economic prosperity. Finally, the “Maravi empire” may also have been conducive to greater cultural similarity between the different matrilineal peoples of the northern Zambezi region, as can be attested by the fact that the peoples in this region share the same clan-names and have a common descent system.⁽³⁸⁾

Toward the middle of the 18th century, however, the Maravi political system began to decline everywhere in northern Zambezia. The most articulate expression of this decline took the form of revolts against the Kalonga, Lundu and Undi paramountcies. There were revolts against the Kalonga by a number of chiefs in the Lilongwe area of modern Central Malaŵi. At the same time, Undi was also confronted with revolts led by Biwi and his other subordinates, while in the east the Lolo and Makua also revolted against the Lundu’s overlordship.⁽³⁹⁾ Some of these revolts, particularly in Undi’s kingdom, were occasioned by the Portuguese scramble for the gold that had been discovered in the kingdom.

Another factor which contributed to the decline of the Maravi paramountcies was the growing reluctance of Makewana who controlled the central Chewa religious shrine at Msinja in Lilongwe, to use her ritual powers in the interest of the Kalonga and Undi ruling dynasties. It has been argued that unlike the *Svikiro* mediums who faithfully served the interest of the Mutapa state south of the Zambezi, Makewana and her subordinate rain-callers did not always exercise their ritual authority in a manner that would have bolstered the institution of Maravi kingship.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The early Makewanas had been key links in the religious unity of the Kalonga and Undi kingdoms. They were entrusted with the performance of the religious rituals upon which the Kalonga and Undi depended for the well being of their followers. The Makewanas of the 18th century, on the other hand, developed secular ambitions as well. They carved out their own sphere of influence between the kingdoms of Kalonga and Undi, and on one occasion even set warriors to raid into the domains of the Kalonga. This defection of Makewana meant that both the Kalonga and Undi were deprived of the mystical sanctions which they had hitherto exercised over their followers through the agency of Makewana.⁽⁴¹⁾

Finally, a factor which was crucial to the decline of the Lundu’s influence east of the Shire River was the emergence of Makua–Lolo nationalism in the 18th century. Makua nationalism then was primarily anti-Portuguese.⁽⁴²⁾ The coastal Makua in particular objected to the “divide and rule” policies of the Portuguese as well as to the capricious trade policies of individual Portuguese. However, it was not until they began to acquire firearms from the French and Brazilian slave-dealers that the Makua challenged the Portuguese.

Led by powerful chiefs like Mauruka and Murimuno, they waged a bitter war of contrition against the Portuguese and their African allies from 1749 to the end of the century. The challenge which the Coastal Makua gave to Portuguese imperialism on the Mozambique Coast must have inspired the Makua and Lolo further inland from the Coast into similar campaigns against foreign domination. In the inland areas, it was the Maravi rather than Portuguese who became the object of Makua-Lolo hostility. Maravi overrule was therefore shaken from Quelimane in the east to mount Morambala on the shire in the west.⁽⁴³⁾

Thus far our concern has been primarily with political processes of change. The people of Northern Zambezia in the period under consideration, however, were also greatly affected by their growing economic contacts with the outside world.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Such economic contacts followed logically from the presence of commercialised Afro-Arabs and of the Portuguese along the Mozambique Coast and on the Zambezi River.

The economic orientation of Northern Zambezi peoples to the outside world owed more to earlier Afro-Arab enterprise along the Zambezi than to later Portuguese commercial drive in the region. The Portuguese at first showed little interest in the trade prospects of northern Zambezia because of their deeper involvement in the gold trade of Southern Zambezia.⁽⁴⁵⁾ By the end of the 16th century, however, Portuguese commercial attitude toward the country lying north of the Zambezi had changed, and the Maravi found a lucrative market for their ivory at Sena, then the most important Portuguese town on the Zambezi. From the Lundu's state, Portuguese traders who sailed up the Shire from Sena obtained ironware, *machila* cloths, salt and ivory in exchange for cloth, beads and brassware.⁽⁴⁶⁾ With some of these Mang'anja products, such as ironware and *machila* cloths, the Portuguese then conducted further business in the lands of the Muhnumutapa south of the Zambezi River.

Further up the Zambezi, the Portuguese at Tete established economic relations with the heartland of the Maravi confederation in the Upper Shire valley and along the southern littoral of lake Malaŵi. In particular, Tete was conveniently located for Portuguese commercial penetration of Undi's kingdom among the Southern Chewa. This kingdom was rich in ivory, primarily because of its proximity to the elephant-abounding country between the Luangwa valley in the west and Dzalanyama range of mountains in the east. Many Portuguese residents of Tete were reported as participants in the ivory trade with Undi's kingdom in the 1660's⁽⁴⁷⁾

With the foundation of a *feira* at Zumbo in 1716, the Portuguese had access to the ivory, copper and gold of the country west of Undi's kingdom as far as Southern Zambia. Between 1732 and 1783, therefore, Portuguese traders and their African agents from Zumbo

exchanged goods and services with traders from the Chewa, Nsenga, Lenje and Tonga societies.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The rest of the 18th century witnessed the rapid expansion and then decline of Portuguese trade with the peoples of northern Zambezia. Expansion began in the early 18th Century when Portuguese traders turned north of the Zambezi after the Rozvi Mambo and Muhnumutapa had expelled them from Southern Zambezia in the 1690's.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Portuguese traders and their Chikunda retainers then ventured into the northern interior where they sometimes spent as many as eighteen months doing business among the peoples of those parts. Ivory, the most important commodity sought, was a monopoly of the chiefs in most of the societies concerned and it is possible that the rising demand gave rise to many illegal channels for taking it away from the hunters. The decline of the Chewa – Maravi paramountcies during this period may therefore also have been influenced by this factor.

Portuguese commercial interest north of the Zambezi received a major boost between 1744 and 1790 when gold deposits were discovered in Undi's kingdom. *Bares* or mines were opened at Michionga, Maano (the Undi's capital), Java and Muchinga, all of which places lay within two to three days walking distance from the Undi's capital on the Kapoche River. The miners from Tete, who were either Portuguese or Goanese, insisted upon absolute ownership of the diggings and all essential means of production. In return for this magnanimous privilege, they made offers of gifts and royalties to the Undi and his subordinates. Recalcitrant chiefs were crushed by the white mine-owners who employed private armies for this purpose. Under this system of production, approximately 3,500 ounces of gold were extracted before the supply began to dwindle in the 1780's.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Unfortunately for the Portuguese, the gold-rush also contributed to their loss of the ivory trade. The diggings attracted an interest out of proportion with their productivity. Meanwhile, the ivory trade north of the Zambezi fell into the hands of new competitors from the northeast. These were the Yao, a people who have been singularly associated with the development of long-distance trade throughout East Central Africa.

The Yao emerged as a dominant trading nation in the late 17th and early 18th centuries,⁽⁵¹⁾ and there are two related interpretations of how they rose to this position and status. Abdul Sheriff has maintained that Yao orientation to Coast-bound trade was the result of a chain reaction. The Yao are said to have simply responded to commercial influences which first affected the Ngindo and Makua Lomwe who were nearer to the Coast than themselves.⁽⁵²⁾ Of late, James Webster has proposed that what made the Yao response to coastal commercial influences so spectacular was their occupation of hilly and marginal agricultural country in which it was not possible

for them to make a success of farming or hunting.⁽⁵³⁾ Their Nyanja or Chewa neighbours to the west and Lomwe to the east were better agriculturalists and hunters, respectively.

Whatever their advantages were vis-à-vis control of trade, the Yao rose and dominated the ivory trade from the Mozambique Coast, through Southern and central Malaŵi, to eastern Zambia. By about 1750 they had linked their commercial activities with those of the Bisa who traded ivory on behalf of the Lunda Kingdom of Kazembe on the Luapula river of northeastern Zambia.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Ivory supplies from the Chewa of central Malaŵi and Bisa of Zambia increased the volume of trade goods which the Yao had for onward transmission to Kilwa and Mozambique Island on the East Coast.

One result of this trade which developed through northern Zambezia in the 18th century was that economic production in the societies concerned tended to be geared to satisfying the needs of external rather than internal economies. Production for the external market often took the form of hunting, mining and travelling, while the major traders were notorious for staying away from their homelands or attaching themselves semi-permanently to the courts of their chiefly patrons.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The consequences for predominantly agricultural societies could be negative under these circumstances.

As far as the country north of the Zambezi was concerned a meaningful assessment of the effect of trade has to take into account the pre-existing social structure of the societies concerned. In this region, it is clear that the chiefly lineages benefitted from the control of trade in ivory, even though such control was lost to most of them as time passed. Even commoners may have derived some benefits from this kind of trade. Long-distance or international trade promoted economic specialisation, while the increased circulation of tradeable commodities which interaction with outside trade systems entailed must have been of interest to many people.

It should be noted, in passing, that as the 18th century drew to a close, a remarkable change took place in the nature of long-distance trade in northern Zambezia. Ivory began to be superseded by slaves as the main trade commodity which Central Africans had to offer to the outside world. This change, though by no means complete, was pronounced enough to warrant the identification of the 18th Century with the ivory trade and the 19th with the slave trade.

In Northern Zambezia, the main agents of the slave merchants were the Portuguese and their Chikunda clients, the Yao and the Bisa.⁽⁵⁶⁾ As far as the Portuguese and Chikunda were concerned, it was the failure of the gold diggings and loss of the ivory trade north of the Zambezi to the Yao which forced them to turn to the slave trade for economic survival. They thus gradually became active in the slave trade to the French islands of Re-union and Bourbon in the Indian Ocean in the 1780's and in that which was directed to Brazil in Latin America from about 1800 onwards.⁽⁵⁷⁾

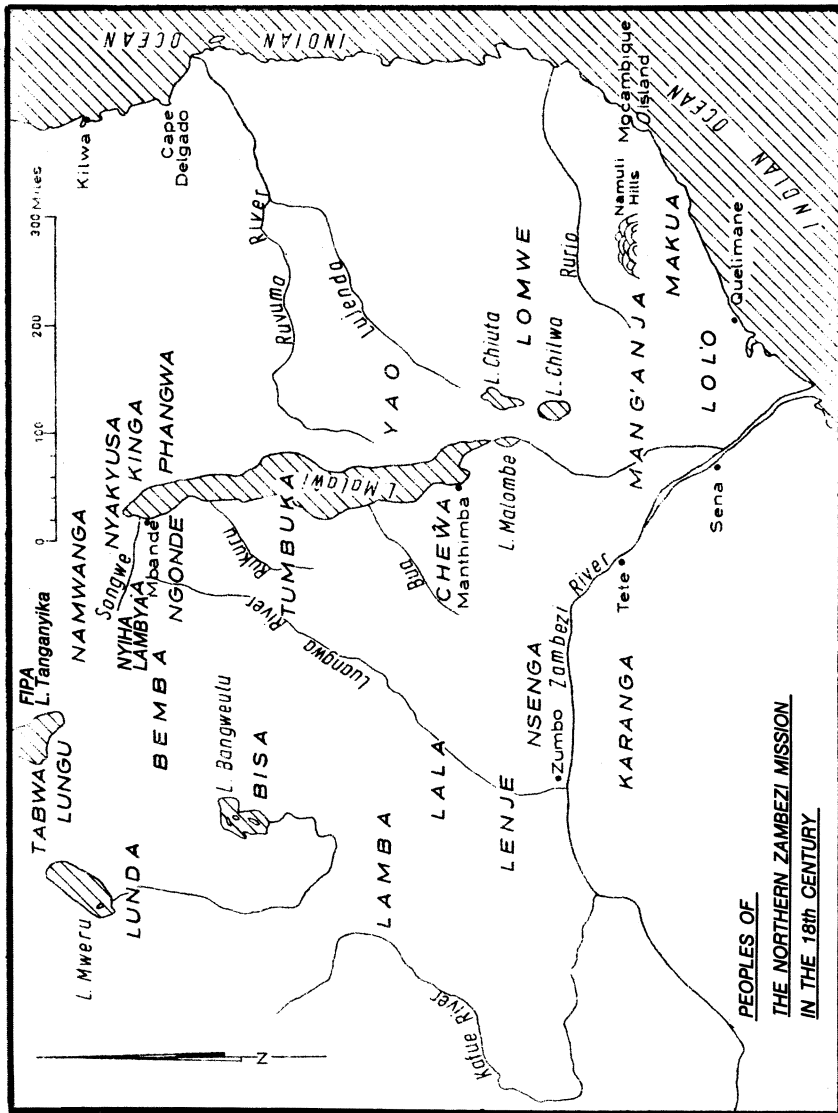
According to Yohanna B. Abdallah, the Yao, and perhaps their Bisa counterparts as well, turned to the slave trade because this was the sphere of trading activity into which they were forced by coastal demand at the time.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Indeed, the Kilwa market to which the Yao took their wares from the interior began to be dominated by the slave trade from the 1770's onwards.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The market – conscious Yao probably then began to displace ivory with slaves in their caravans from the interior.

All the major slave traders – Portuguese, Bisa and Yao drew their supply of slaves from among the Makua, Chewa, Nsenga and Bisa. Several factors helped the slave traders in their search for slaves from these societies. Slaves were available even to those communities which did not have skilled elephant hunters to procure ivory for them. Among the Chewa, it will be noted, the growth of the slave trade coincided with the decline of the Maravi paramountcies of the Kalonga, Lundu and Undi. Chiefs once subordinate to these rulers became extremely jealous of their newly established autonomy and fought each other incessantly in order to maintain their independency. In the resultant wars, disposable captives were acquired by all the parties concerned.

SUMMARY

The article is a presentation and interpretation of historical events north of the lower Zambezi river from the 16th to 18th century. It maintains that at the beginning of this period, different Bantu-speaking ethnic groups who had occupied the region in earlier centuries were spreading their cultural and territorial influence at the expense of the earlier inhabitants. Thereafter, the history of these ethnic groups was dominated by the growth and expansion of the Maravi state system and its impact on the Nsenga in the west and Lolo-Makua-Yao in the east.

But while the Maravi set the pace of political events in the 16th and 17th centuries, the region was also drawn into systems of economic interaction with the outside world as the Portuguese and later on Yao traders began to visit it in search of ivory. One result of this commercial involvement was that some societies in the region became witnesses to the bitter rivalry which developed between the Portuguese and Yao over spheres of commercial influence. The Yao, who almost won the contest, eventually acceded to sharing the trade of the area with the Portuguese after the latter found a new source of wealth in the growth of the slave trade. Thus, in the late 18th century – a period when Maravi political power was in decline – the pace of change in Northern Zambezia was set by a series of external economic influences of which the slave trade became more and more pronounced.



FOOTNOTES

1. For a summary of the social traditions of the people found in Northeastern Zambia, Central and Southern Malaŵi, and Northern Mozambique, see J. Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna: A History of Central African States to 1900* (University of Wisconsin Press 1966), pp. 32 – 32; and G.W.B. Huntingford, "The Peopling of the interior of East Africa by its modern Inhabitants" in R. Oliver and G. Mathew (eds.), *History of East Africa*, vol. 1 (Oxford. The Clazendon Press, 1963), p. 82.
2. E. H. Lane-Poole, *The Native Tribes of the Eastern Luangwa Province of Northern Rhodesia* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1938) pp. 36–37; and K. M. Phiri, "Cheŵa History in Central Malaŵi and the use of Oral Traditon, 1600 – 1920" (unpublished Ph. D thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1975), pp. 46 – 47.
3. R. Apthorpe, "Problems of African History: The Nsenga of Northern Rhodesia, " *Rhodes – Livingstone Journal*, vol. 28 (1960) pp. 51–58.
4. Lane – Poole, *The Native Tribes*, pp. 37 – 40.
5. H. W. Langworthy, "Sources of Cheŵa History in East Central Africa" (Supplementary Material for the Ph.D in African History, Boston University Library, 1969). The writer of this article is currently editing over 100 interviews on Cheŵa History for final deposit in the National Archives of Malaŵi, Zomba, and the University of Malaŵi Library also in Zomba.
6. Also see T. Price, "More about the Maravi," *African Studies*, vol. XI (1952), p. 78, for an earlier view of the subject.
7. For a summary of the "Kapirintiwa Creation Myth," see Phiri, "Cheŵa History in Central Malaŵi," pp. 41 – 42.
8. M. J. Schoffeelers, "Towards the identification of a Proto-Cheŵa culture, " *Malaŵi Journal of Social Science*. vol. II (1973), pp. 48 – 56.
9. This kind of research was not possible under the Portuguese colonial regime in Mozambique. The situation has probably changed now, as the Centro de Estudos Africanos in Maputo is currently committed to serving this kind of research need.
10. L. D. Soka, *Mbiri ya Alomwe* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1953), pp. 3 – 9; E. A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa to the later 19th Century* (London, Heinemann 1975), p. 9.
11. According to Alpers in *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 8 – 15, the Makua claim to have spread into other parts of Northern Mozambique from the Namuli hills of central Northern Mozambique, while the Yao claim an origin from "Yao Hill" somewhere between the Rovuma and Luambala rivers.
12. Soka, *Mbiri ya Alomwe*, pp. 3 – 4; J. B. Webster, "From Yao Hill to Mulanje Mountain: Ivory and Slaves and the Southwestern Expansion of the Yao" (History Staff Research Seminar, Chancellor College, University of Malaŵi, November 1977) p. 2; and P. R. Rashid, "Originally lomwe and linguistically yao: The Rise of the Mbewe, 1760 – 1840" (Staff – Student Research Seminar, Chancellor college, January 1978), p. 4.
13. Robinson, "The Iron Age in Malaŵi: A Brief Account of Recent work" in B. Pachai (ed), *Early History of Malaŵi* (London: Longmans, 1972), pp. 61 – 63; Schoffeelers, "Towards the identification of a Proto-Cheŵa Culture, "p. 47; and Phiri, "Cheŵa History in Central Malaŵi," pp. 51 – 52.
14. R. O. Collins (ed.) *Problems in African History* (Prentice – Hall, 1968), pp. 211 – 288.
15. M. G. Marwich, "History and Tradition in Central Africa through the eyes of the Northern Rhodesia Cheŵa," *Journal of African History*. vol. IV, No. 3 (1963), pp. 377 – 378; M. J. Schofeelers, "The Meaning and Use of the name 'Malaŵi' in Oral Traditions and Pre-colonial Documents" in Pachai (ed.), *Early History of Malaŵi*, pp. 96 – 99.
16. A. D. Roberts, *A History of Zambia* (London. Heinemann, 1976), p. 84.
17. Phiri, "Cheŵa History in Central Malaŵi," pp. 52 – 54; J. A. K. Kandawire, *Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance* (Blantyre: Hetherwick Press, 1978), pp. 32 – 48.
18. J. Batalha – Reis, "The Portuguese in Nyasaland," *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, vol. 5 (1889), p. 257.
19. Phiri, "Cheŵa History in Central Malaŵi," pp. 52 – 55.

20. I. Linden, "The Shrine of the Kalongas at Mankhamba: Some Problems in the Religious History of Central Malaŵi (Conference Paper, Lusaka Conference on the History of Central African Religious Systems, 1972), pp. 1 – 4; also S. Y. Nthara, *Mbiri ya Achewa* (1948 ed), pp. 17 – 24.
21. For a Summary of the relative positions held by the Kaphwiti and Lundu in the pre-colonial politics of the Lower Shire Valley, see H.H. K. Bhila, "The Kaphwiti – Lundu Complex to 1800: Myth and Reality in the pre-colonial History of the Lower Shire" (Conference Paper, International Conference on the History of Southern Africa, National University of Lesotho, Roma, August 1977).
22. Joao dos Santos, "Eastern Ethiopia" in G.m. Theal (ed.), *Records of South Eastern Africa* (hereafter R.S.E.A.), vol. VII (London, 1899), pp. 263 – 265.
23. Alpers, "The Mutapa and Malaŵi Political Systems to the time of the Ngoni Invasions" in Ranger (ed.), *Aspects of Central African History* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), pp. 20 – 22; and also Schoffeleers, "Symbolic and Social Aspects of spirit Worship among the Manganja" (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Oxford University, 1968), pp. 143 – 159.
24. G. T. Nurse, "The People of Bororo: A Lexicostatistical Enquiry" in Pachai (ed.), *Early History of Malaŵi*, p. 126.
25. Theal (ed.), *R.S.E.A.* vol. III, p. 480; Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, p. 14; and Schoffeleers, "The History and Political role of the M'Bona cult among the Mang'anja" in T.O. Ranger and I. N. Kimambo (ed.), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (London Heinemann, 1972), p. 80.
26. The best examples being the Maviamuno and Mauruka in the hinterland of the Coast opposite Mozambique Island. More on this in Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 82 – 85.
27. Manuel Barreto, "Report upon the State and Conquest of the Rivers of Cuana" in Theal (ed.), *R.S.E.A.*, Vol. III, p. 475.
28. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 25 – 26; E. C. Mandala, "The Kololo Interlude in Southern Malaŵi, 1861 – 1895" (unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of Malaŵi, 1977), pp. 39 – 41.
29. Schoffeleers, "The History and Political Role of the M'Bona cult," p. 76.
30. R. A. Hamilton, "The Route of Gaspar Bocarro from Tete to Kilwa in 1616, " *Nyasaland Journal*" (Hereafter N.J.), vol. VII, No. 2 (1954), pp. 7 – 14, and Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 59 – 62.
31. Alpers, "Eastern Africa" in Gray (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. IV (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 517.
32. H. W. Langworthy, "A History of Undi's kingdom to 1890: Aspects of Chewa History in East – Central Africa" (unpublished Ph.D Thesis, 1969), pp. 148 – 163; Phiri, "The Maravi State System and Chewa Political Development to about 1850" (conference Paper, History Teachers' Conference, University of Malaŵi, August 1977), p. 9.
33. Langworthy, "A History of Undi's Kingdom to 1890," pp. 215 – 216.
34. Langworthy, "Conflict among Rulers in the History of Undi's Chewa Kingdom," *Transafrican Journal of History*, vol. I (1971), p. 12, Lane-Poole, *The Native Tribes of Northern Rhodesia*, pp. 39 – 41.
35. Antonia Gomes, "Viagem que fez a Padres Antonio Gomes da Compagnie de Jesus no imperio de Monomotapa," *Studia*, 3 ((1959), p. 183; Theal (ed.), *R.S.E.A.*, VOL. II p. 395; and Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 54 – 56.
36. Theal (ed.), *R.S.E.A.*, Vol. III, p. 480, also M. D. D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi* (London Longmans, 1973), p. 80.
37. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, pp. 56 – 58. Alpers also holds the view that as time passed, participation in this trade was unremunerative for most peoples of East-Central Africa.
38. Webster makes this point in his paper, "Ivory and Slaves and the Southwestern Expansion of the Yao, "pp. 4 – 5.
39. Phiri, "Chewa History in Cental Malaŵi, "pp. 78 – 79; A. F. Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanisation of the Zambesi Prazos, 1750 – 1902* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), pp. 13 – 15.

40. Isaacman, *Mozambique*, p. 15
41. Nthara, *Mbiri ya Acheŵa*, pp. 72 – 78; Cheŵa Oral Historical Texts with Chapadenga Mwale, Lepiya Banda and Jazeli Mbewe, Chadza Misozi Traditional Court, Lilongwe, 4/5/74; and also with Jamu Pazela Mwale, Undi village, T.A. Chadza, Lilongwe, 6/5/74.
42. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 104 – 113.
43. A. Rita – Ferreira, *Os Chevas da Macanga* (Lorengo Marques, 1966). pp. 34, Mandala, “Kololo Interlude in Southern Malaŵi,” pp. 43 – 44.
44. This has been ably reviewed by Alpers in the Introduction to his book, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*.
45. Alpers, “Eastern Africa” in Gray (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. IV, p. 517.
46. Theal (ed.), *R.S.E.A.* vol. III, pp. 480 – 481, Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 25 – 27, and Mandala, “The Kololo Interlude in Southern Malaŵi,” p. 41.
47. Manual Barreto, “Report upon the State and Conquest of the Rivers of Cuana” in Theal (ed.), *R.S.E.A.*, Vol. III, pp. 480 – 481
48. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi*, pp. 75 – 79, N. Sutherland – Harris, “Zambian Trade with Zumbo in the 18th Century” in R. Gray and D. Birmingham (eds.), *Pre-colonial African Trade* (London, 1970) pp. 231 – 242.
49. H. H. K. Bhila, “Some Aspects of Pre-colonial African Trade south of the Zambezi,” *Malaŵi Journal of Social Science* (hereafter M.J.S.S.), vol. IV (1975), pp. 108 – 110; Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi*, pp. 70 – 71; and E. Axelson, *Portuguese in Southeast Africa 1600 – 1700* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1964), p.179.
50. Isaacman, *Mozambique*, pp. 70 – 71; Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi*, pp. 79 – 84.
51. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 76 – 81.
52. A. M. Sheriff, “The Rise of a Commercial Empire: An Economic History of Zanzibar, 1770 – 1873” (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1971), pp. 208 – 217.
53. Webster, “Ivory and Slaves and the Southwestern Expansion of the Yao,” pp. 3 – 6.
54. R. F. Burton (ed.), *The Lands of Cazembe: Lacerda’s Journey to Kazembe in 1798* (London: John Murray, 1873), p. 95; Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, pp. 171 – 172.
55. Phiri, “Pre-colonial Economic Change in Central Malaŵi, 1850 – 1875,” *M.J.S.S.*, Vol. V (1976), pp. 22 – 23; Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 264 – 267.
56. Burton (ed.), *The Lands of Cazembe*, pp. 81 – 87.
57. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, pp. 209 – 219; Isaacman, *Mozambique*, pp. 85 – 94.
58. Y. B. Abdallah, *The Yaos*, edited and translated from Ciyao by M. Sanderson, with a New Introduction by E. Alpers (London: Frank Lass edition, 1973), pp. 29 – 37.
59. G. S. P. Freeman – Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island An Episode in 18th Century East African History* (Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 43 – 48.